-14-

CLAIMS

1. An ordering and collection facilitation system comprising:

5   a database storing information including an identification of each of a plurality of items available for order and a value corresponding to a respective order therefore:

a plurality of portable data storage media:

at least one user terminal including a viewer for viewing a menu of said items available for order, a selector for selecting at least one of said items to

10   produce selection information, a reader for reading one of said portable data storage media and a data associator for associating the selection information with data read from said portable data storage medium;

a database updator for updating the database with the selection information from said at least one user terminal associated with said data read from

15   the data storage medium, so as to accumulate the selected quantity of each of said items and to store the accumulated quantity in said database;

a display for displaying the accumulated quantity; and

a display operable upon reading data from one of the portable data storage media to display the selection information associated therewith.

20

2. An ordering and collection facilitation system according to claim 1, wherein said items are food items and said apparatus is for use in a canteen environment.

25   3. An ordering and collection facilitation system according to claim 1 or 2, wherein said display for displaying the accumulated required quantity is the same as the display for displaying the selection information.

4. An ordering and collection facilitation system according to claim 3,

30   wherein said viewer is the same as said display.

-15-

5.   An ordering and collection facilitation system according to claim 3, wherein said display is located on an operator terminal, said operator terminal also having a reader for reading one of said data storage media.

5   6.   An ordering and collection facilitation system according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein said database is stored on a server connected to said at least one user terminal, said server being in at least one-way communication with said at least one user terminal and said system being such that said user terminal communicates to said server the selection information and associated information

10   read from said data storage medium.

7.   An ordering and collection facilitation system according to claim 6, wherein said operator terminal is in at least one-way communication with said server, the system being such that said selection information and said accumulated quantity

15   are communicated to said operator terminal by said server.

8.   An ordering and collection facilitation system according to claim 6 or 7, wherein said at least one user terminal is in two-way communication with said server and said server further includes means for communicating to said at

20   least one user terminal an identification of each of a plurality of items available so that said user terminal can display on the viewer the menu of available items.

9.   An ordering and collection facilitation system according to claim 6, wherein said at least one operator terminal is in two-way communication with said

25   server and said operator terminal further includes means for communicating to said server that said at least one selected item has been collected by a user.

10.   An ordering and collection facilitation system according to any one of the preceding claims, further comprising means for communicating with a

30   supplier terminal an order for new supplies, said order being based on the items selected by users in a predetermined period of time.

-16-

11.   An ordering and collection facilitation system according to claim 10 when dependent from claim 6, wherein said order is communicated by said server.

12.   An ordering and collection facilitation system according to any

5   one of the preceding claims, wherein said system is connected to the internet to provide downloadable web pages thereto, and is operable to update said database in accordance with items selected by users browsing the web pages, said system being further arranged to accumulate the information it receives via the internet with the information it receives from said at least one user terminal.

10

13.   An ordering and collection facilitation system comprising a plurality of ordering and collection facilitation systems according to any one of the preceding claims each at a different site, all connected to a master server for accumulating information relating to the quantities of said items ordered at said different sites.

15

14.   An ordering and collection facilitation system according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein said selection information comprises the identity and number of the item(s) selected at the user terminal.

20   15.   An ordering and collection facilitation system according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein each of said plurality of portable data storage media contains a unique identifier.

16.   An ordering and collection facilitation system according to any one of

25   the preceding claims, wherein each of said portable data storage media contains data relating to an amount of money, said amount being reduced when a user confirms a selection of at least one item at said at least one user terminal.

17.   An ordering and collection facilitation system according to any one of

30   the preceding claims, wherein said portable data storage medium is a smart card.

-17-

18.   A method of ordering, and facilitating the collection of, items, said method comprising:

displaying at a user terminal a menu of available items;

allowing a user to select at least one item;

5   reading a portable data storage medium;

accumulating selection information so as to calculate the total required quantity of said at least one selected item;

displaying a required quantity of said at least one selected item;

preparing a quantity of said at least one selected item based on said

10 display;

reading said portable data storage medium;

displaying the identity of said at least one selected item in response to the reading of said portable data storage medium.

15   19.   A method according to claim 18 further comprising:

after said first reading step:

transmitting data read from said portable data storage medium and data identifying said at least one selected item to a server and receiving said transmitted data at said server;

20   after said accumulating step:

transmitting to an operator terminal data identifying said at least one selected food item and the required quantity thereof as well as data read from said portable data storage medium; and

receiving said transmitted data at said operator terminal;

25   wherein said selection information is collated at said server and said required quantity of said at least one selected item is displayed at said operator terminal.

20.   A method according to claim 19, wherein said items are food

30 items.

-18-

21.   A method according to claim 19 or 20, further comprising:

transmitting data corresponding to an available menu from said server or operator terminal to said user terminal.

5   22.   A method according to claim 19 or 20, further comprising:

transmitting data indicating that the selected item has been collected from said operator terminal to said server.

23.   A method according to any one of claims 18 to 22, further
10   comprising:

transmitting data to a supplier terminal, said information being data indicating required supplies of said items, the requirement being based at least in part on the quantity of items selected by the users in a predetermined period of time.

15   24.   A method according to any one of claims 18 to 23, further comprising:

hosting an internet web page displaying said items and receiving data via the internet relating to a choice of items for a particular user.

20   25.   A method according to any one of claims 18 to 24, further comprising:

·   updating the data on said portable data storage medium so as to have the effect of extracting payment for the selected item from said user.

25   26.   A method according to any one of claims 18 to 25, wherein the step of displaying a required quantity of said at least one selected item is carried out at a selected time after a plurality of users have selected at least one item.